



On Campus with Max Shulman

(Author of "Breakfast Boy With Cheek," etc.)

I WAS AWARDED A RIBBON AND PROMPTLY PUT IT IN MY TYPEWRITER

First of all—how come?

How do I come to be writing a column for Philip Morris in your campus newspaper?

I'll tell you how come:

It all began on a summer night. The air was warm, the sky was full of stars, and I sat in a cane-bottomed chair on my veranda, peaceful and serene, smoking a cigarette, humming the lullaby from *Death and Transfiguration*, and warming my dog.

Into this idyllic scene came a stranger—a tall, clean limbed stranger, trimly-eyed and crooked-shouldered, home and lank. "How do you do," he said. "My name is Loose Lank and I am with the Philip Morris people."

"Enchanted," I said. "Take off your hamburger and sit down." I clapped my hands. "Charles!" I called. "Another chair for Mr. Lank."

Obediently my dog trotted away and returned directly with a fat-lank chair of Mainman rattan. He is the smartest dog in our block.

"I'm sorry I don't have a Morris chair," I said to Mr. Lank. "That would be rather more appropriate—you being with Philip Morris and all."

Well, sir, we had many a laugh and cheer over my little witticism. When we had finished laughing and cheering, we wiped our eyes and Mr. Lank pulled out a fresh package of Philip Morris. He yanked the tape and the pack sprang open with a fetching little snap.

"Did you hear that fetching little snap?" asked Mr. Lank.

"Yes," I said, for I did.

"Cigarette?" he said.

"Thank you," I said.

We puffed contentedly for three or four bouts. Then Mr. Lank said, "I suppose you're wondering why I'm here."

"Well," I replied, my old eyes twinkling, "I'll wager you didn't come to read my meter."

You can imagine how we howled at that one!

"That's a ditty!" cried Mr. Lank, giggling wildly. "I must remember to tell it to Alice when I get home."

"Your wife?" I said.

"My father," he said.

"Oh," I said.

"Well," he said, "let's get down to business... How would you like to write a campus column for Philip Morris?"

"For money?" I said.

"Yes," he said.

"My hand, sir," I said and clasped his. Warmly he returned the pressure, and soft smiles played on our lips, and our eyes were bright with the hint of tears, and we were silent, not trusting ourselves to speak.

"Cigarette?" he said at length.

I nodded.

We lit up and puffed contentedly for eight or ten hours. "I understand you've made quite a study of college students," said Mr. Lank.

"Yes," I said, blushing modestly. "I have been collecting them for years. I have over four thousand students in my basement right now."

"In mint condition?" he said incredulously.

"Students don't come in mint condition," I explained. "They go to great expense to acquire the 'beat-up look.'"

"How interesting," he said. "Tell me something more about them—their feeding habits, for example."

"They are omnivores of prodigious appetite," I said. "It is wise not to leave food about when they are present. Their favorite food is a dish called the Varsity Gamet—one scoop raspberry ice, one scoop raw hamburger, leeches nuts and maple syrup."

"Fascinating," said Mr. Lank. "And what are students interested in chiefly?"

"Each other," I replied. "Boy students are interested in girl students, and girl students are interested in boy students."

"This seems to me an admirable arrangement," said Mr. Lank. "But is it true even in these perilous days of worldwide tension and dreadful armaments?"

"It is always true," I said. "It isn't that college students don't know what's going on in the world. They know all too well. They're perfectly aware of the number of lumps waiting for them... But meanwhile the limbs are springy and the juices run strong and time is fleeting."

"What will you write about in your column?" asked Mr. Lank.

"About boys and girls," I said. "About fraternities and sororities and dormitories and boarding houses and dances and sleighrides and hayrides and cutting classes and going to classes and cramming for exams and campus politics and the profits of bookstores and curvilinear and hMOs and BWOs and professors who write new texts every year and the world's slowest humans—the page boys at the library."

"And will you say a pleasant word about Philip Morris from time to time?" asked Mr. Lank.

"Sir," I replied, "I can think of no other kind of word to say about Philip Morris."

We shook hands again then, and smiled bravely. Then he was gone—a tall silhouette moving erectly into the setting sun. "Farewell, good tobaccoist!" I cried after him. "Aloha, aloha!"

And turned with a will to my typewriter.

(Max Shulman, 1951)

This column is brought to you by the makers of PHILIP MORRIS who think you would enjoy their cigarette.

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